

The IAEA's Iran Report: Assessment and Implications

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The [IAEA report](#) and annex released today provides disturbing and “credible” additional details regarding Iranian nuclear warhead development efforts that have allowed Tehran to acquire some of the expertise needed to build nuclear weapons, should it decide to do so.

The broad outline in the IAEA's latest report on the military dimensions of Iran's program is not new, but rather, provides greater detail regarding weapons-related activities outlined in previous public reports.

The IAEA report and annex reinforce what the nonproliferation community has recognized for some time: that Iran engaged in various nuclear weapons development activities until 2003, then stopped many of them, but continued others.

The activities documented in the IAEA report, including research related to nuclear warheads, underscore that Tehran's claims that it is only seeking the peaceful use of nuclear energy are false.

Iran's warhead work also contradicts its obligation not to pursue nuclear weapons under the nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT), under which states parties commit “not to seek or receive any assistance in the manufacture of nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices.”

The report suggests that Iran is working to shorten the timeframe to building the bomb once and if it makes that decision. But it remains apparent that a nuclear-armed Iran is still not imminent nor is it inevitable.

The report should prompt greater international pressure on Tehran to respond more fully to the IAEA's questions, allow for more extensive inspections of its nuclear facilities, engage more seriously in talks on its nuclear program, and to agree to confidence building steps to help resolve the crisis.

Comparison of the IAEA's Findings with Public U.S. Intelligence Assessments

Because the IAEA report is based largely on intelligence the United States and other IAEA member states have been sharing with the agency for some time, in addition to the agency's own investigations, the information in the report likely provides greater insight into current U.S. assessments about Iran's nuclear program.

The U.S. intelligence community appears to stand by the judgment made in the 2007 NIE that Iran had a nuclear weapons program that was halted in the fall of 2003. Moreover, in his testimony before a Senate committee in March 2011, U.S. Director of National Intelligence James Clapper confirmed that the intelligence community still had *a high level of confidence* that Iran has not yet made a decision restart its nuclear weapons program.

Because the weapons program is believed to refer to the series of projects the IAEA report details, Clapper's statement is not inconsistent with the notion that some weapons-related R&D has resumed which is not part of a determined, integrated weapons-development program of the type that Iran maintained prior to 2003.

Consistent with the finding of the 2007 U.S. National Intelligence Estimate, the IAEA report says that a comprehensive weapons program (known as the AMAD Plan) "was stopped rather abruptly pursuant to a 'halt order,'" in late 2003, but that some of the program's activities were resumed later. Key personnel are still involved in those renewed activities apparently tying up loose ends regarding their prior research and development work.

Summary of Key IAEA Findings on Weapons-Related Activities

The IAEA deserves credit for continuing to press the issue and to present this important information to the IAEA Board of Governors in spite of Tehran's unwillingness to cooperate with the investigation. This resolve helps to bolster the integrity of the agency and show that countries cannot simply get away with nonproliferation violations by denial and obfuscation.

According to the report, Iran was engaged in an effort prior to the end of 2003 which ran the full range of nuclear weapons development, from acquiring the raw nuclear material to working on a weapon they could eventually deliver via a missile. Just as important as the type of work being carried out is how that work was organized. The series of projects that made up Iran's nuclear program appears to have been overseen by "senior Iranian figures" and engaged in "working level correspondence" consistent with a coordinated program.

Key components of this program include:

- **Fissile Material Production:** As documented in previous reports, Iran ran an undeclared effort to produce uranium-tetrafluoride (also known as Green Salt), a precursor for the uranium used in the enrichment process. The affiliation between this project and other projects directly related to warhead development suggests that Iran's nuclear weapons program included both fissile material production and warhead development. Although the report does not detail a uranium enrichment effort as part of the AMAD Plan, the secret nature of the Natanz enrichment plant prior to 2002 suggests that it was originally intended to produce the highly enriched uranium (HEU) for weapons.
- **High Explosives Testing:** Iran's experiments involving exploding bridgewire (EBW) detonators and the simultaneous firing of explosives around a hemispherical shape points to work on nuclear warhead design. The agency says that the type of high explosives testing matches an existing nuclear weapon design. Iran admits to carrying out such work, but claims it is for conventional military purposes and disputes some of the technical details.
- **Warhead Design Verification:** Iran carried out experiments using high explosives to test the validity of its warhead design and engaged in preparatory work to carry out a full-scale underground nuclear test explosion.
- **Shahab-3 Re-entry Vehicle:** Documentation reviewed by the IAEA has suggested that, as late as 2003, Iran sought to develop a nuclear warhead small enough to fit on the Shahab-3 missile. Confronted with some

of the studies, Iran admitted to the IAEA that such work would constitute nuclear weapons development, but Tehran denies carrying out the research.

The IAEA admits that it has less information regarding warhead-related work Iran has continued to pursue since 2003, but the report has provided some insight into the type of activities that Iran subsequently resumed, which seems to be focused on warhead design verification. The fact that the agency was able to detail some of the organizational changes that have taken place since 2003, including the current position of the person who formerly oversaw the AMAD Plan, suggests that intelligence agencies still have considerable insight into Iran's nuclear program. Tehran will likely be concerned about its inability to hide such important information and will likely engage in further restructuring following this report, which may delay its efforts once again.

Considering the IAEA's reliance on intelligence information from states, it went through considerable length to demonstrate why it thought this information was credible. It was not just a matter of acquiring consistent information from over 10 countries, but it seems some of the most incriminating evidence comes from the AQ Khan network, which Iran admits it relied upon. The information from the Khan network includes details about nuclear warhead designs the network gave Iran that match up to the research and experiments detailed in the intelligence information.

The IAEA Board of Governors Needs to Respond

The report will be considered by the IAEA Board of Governors at its next meeting Nov. 17-18, along with a draft resolution censuring Iran for violating its nonproliferation commitments. The Board's 35 members cannot ignore Iran's warhead development activities or Tehran's refusal to cooperate with the IAEA's investigation into that work. It must also insist that Iran improve its cooperation with the agency prior to the next board meeting.

A consensus response is unlikely given existing divisions among the 35 countries, and in particular, Cuba's current membership on the board. Beijing and Moscow have also unfortunately played an unhelpful role prior to the release of the report by calling on Director-General Yukiya Amano to limit the information detailed it contains.

However, it is important that the board's response receives support from as many countries as possible to demonstrate to Tehran that it cannot engage in work directly related to nuclear weapons with impunity.

In particular, developing countries on the IAEA Board of Governors should no longer treat the Iran nuclear issue as a test case for preserving the right to the peaceful uses of nuclear energy. Rather, it is time that all states insist that Iran stop abusing that right for the development of a nuclear weapons capability and take meaningful steps to cooperate with the IAEA and suspend enrichment work, particularly enrichment of uranium at the 20% level.

Rights and Responsibilities

Iran cannot complain that Western states are trying to deny the Islamic Republic its nuclear "rights." The U.S. position, consistent with the 2006 offer by the P5+1, has been that Iran could resume enrichment some time in the future after it re-establishes confidence with the international community that it is not pursuing nuclear weapons.

As Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton explained it to the House Committee on Foreign Affairs on March 1, 2011, it is the U.S. Government's position is that "under very strict conditions" and "having responded to the international community's concerns," Iran would have a "right" to enrich uranium under IAEA inspections.

In response to the IAEA's report, the international community should redouble efforts to implement existing UN Security Council-mandated sanctions on Iran's nuclear and missile sectors and, if Iran remains unwilling to cooperate with the IAEA and ignore the Security Council, further isolate Iran diplomatically and economically.

Maintain Pressure *and* Engage

In response to the report, the White House has appropriately underscored that the United States continues to focus on using diplomatic channels to pressure Iran to abandon its sensitive nuclear activities.

To keep open the option for an effective negotiated resolution to the crisis, President Barack Obama should also reiterate the willingness of the United States and its P5+1 partners to follow-through on the recent letter from the EU's Catherine Ashton to Iran's leaders offering to engage them in further talks to address the nuclear program.

Continuing pressure through targeted sanctions against Iran's nuclear and missile sectors, coupled with the pursuit of a negotiated agreement to resolve serious concerns over Iran's sensitive nuclear activities and to limit its uranium enrichment capacity provides the best chance of preventing a nuclear-armed Iran.

Talk of military strikes against Iranian nuclear and military targets is unhelpful and counterproductive. Military strikes by the United States and/or Israel would only achieve a temporary delay in Iran's nuclear activities, convince Iran's leadership to openly pursue nuclear weapons, rally domestic support behind a corrupt regime, and would result in costly long-term consequences for U.S. and regional security and the U.S. and global economy.

Ultimately, resolving the nuclear issue will require sufficient pressure and inducement to convince Iran that it stands more to gain from forgoing a nuclear-weapons option and much to lose from any decision to build them.

—PETER CRAIL, DARYL G. KIMBALL, GREG THIELMANN

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